THE NEW IRVING SYSTEM OF STORY AND PLAY WRITING

BOOK 2

THE IRVING SYSTEM

A NEW EASY METHOD OF STORY AND PHOTOPLAY WRITING

BY

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BOOK II

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BOOK II

Chapter VII

DIALOGUE

Good dialogue must be convincing in quality, must portray exactly and suggestively the character from whom the speech comes. The reader will be as quick to observe falsity of speech as he is in natural life when a person with little or no education attempts to use words with whose exact meaning he is in doubt.

Just as the characters are easily differentiated from each other, so must the talk issuing from the mouth of each major individual be readily distinguishable from the speech of all other characters, so different, in fact, that we may be able to identify by the speeches alone the characters to whom they belong. This does not mean, of course, that each character should carry continually with him a set manner of speech. As Arlowe Bates observes, the use of "quotation marks does not convert a passage into dialogue." There are occasions under which even a quiet individual may break into a frenzy of rage. Again, an individual backward and halting in speech may, in an emergency, rise to the severe exigencies of the situation and show that his slowness of speech is acquired and not innate; yet, no matter under what emotion the character may come, his speech must remain consistent with his nature in its larger aspects. No matter what a character may say, we, in reading his speeches, must be able to observe that it is entirely possible from what we know and understand of the man.

Dialogue should portray a character's mood. At many points in emotional stories, made up of several minor and one major crises, the characters constantly will be under the influence of stirring feelings which they must explain. It is the author's part

to translate these emotions in an understandable manner and, through their enunciation, bring out the character's personality.

In a short story, the dialogue should never be allowed to digress from the development of the plot, as it does in many of the early nineteenth century novels, especially those of Dickens. When characters are allowed to tell personal experiences and to chirp on in a manner which brings out their humorous make-up, they are not helping along the story, they are merely a means of drawing caricatures for the patient and long-winded reader. Every bit of dialogue in the short story should be absolutely indispensable, so that, if any be left out, the sense of the story will be spoiled. The use of dialogue is to further, to push on, the action of the plot. The story moves by the emotions and thoughts of the characters; and, as dialogue portrays both thought and emotion, the story progresses rapidly by the correct use of dialogue.

Each speech should contain the hint of that which is to follow, for ever before us we behold the stern figure of Artistic Unity pointing out to us the way of greatest economy in handling our material. The story dialogue may be so suggestive as to tell in a few words the relations of the characters, what brought them together, and what of importance has transpired.

Purpose of Dialogue.

It should be remembered, first and all the time, that dialogue is employed to make a story attractive. Life is made up of conversation among persons. Those persons would hardly be satisfied in exchanging greetings by letter. Man is a social member; he progresses by contact with other men. Hence, the liking for dialogue in stories finds its origin in a prominent element of human nature itself. Nothing is more invigorating and entertaining than living, characteristic, and pregnant dialogue. As Professor Genung has excellently stated:

> If in the characters is involved the profounder fibre of the story, from the management of the dialogue comes largely its more buoyant and popular effect. Uncritical

readers—whose preferences, in fact, ought to be consulted —like a story "with lots of conversation in it." The dialogue serves, as it were, to aerate the movement, which else might grow ponderous and slow. In the give and take of conversation, too, character itself appears, to speak for itself; and many accessory and descriptive elements slip in lightly and unobtrusively in the words that are said. And through it all is traceable the forward movement and the approaching end or crisis.

Dialogue in stories should be a compromise between ordinary conversation and the ideally typical. Take the ordinary conversation heard on the street, in homes, and everywhere people congregate. It is too largely chaotic, haphazard, and aimless for any practical use. It goes forward very slowly and even then its very end is the conversation itself. Story dialogue should not be in line with this. The character must always strive through his speeches to reveal, in the first few words, the key of the situation. No time must be lost in arguing or parleying. As Trollope very truly says:

> The ordinary talk of ordinary people is carried on in short, sharp, expressive sentences, which, very frequently, are never completed, the language of which, even among educated people, is often incorrect. The novel-writer, in constructing his dialogue, must so steer between absolute accuracy of language—which will give to his conversation an air of pedantry—and the slovenly inaccuracy of ordinary talkers—which, if closely followed, would offend by an appearance of grimace, as to produce upon the ear of his readers a sense of reality. If he be quite real, he will seem to attempt to be funny. If he be quite correct, he will seem to be unreal. In all this, human nature must be the writer's guide. But in following human nature, he must remember that he does so with a pen in his hand, and that the reader who will appreciate human nature will also demand artistic ability and literary aptitude.

Perhaps if a group of people should talk continuously for an hour on a subject of interest, enough might be said to enable

a writer to note down several suggestive, typical, and characteristic phrases, sufficient, say, to make up a paragraph or two of dialogue. But that would be about all. The story writer snatches typical bits of speech here and there, from his imagination, from his experience, and everywhere, then binds them together, and constructs his dialogue. The profanity, slang and dialogue of ordinary conversation must be toned down considerably, else the result will be preposterous and vulgar. "The rough neck" must not be shocking, the slang of the newsboy utterly un-English. The reader is reading to enjoy the story, not to be startled by swear words, or disgusted by the slip-shod careless speech with which he is only too familiar in his daily life.

Just as the characters themselves are typical representatives of certain traits, so must their speech portray ideally the peculiarities of these types. It is best only to choose the most interesting and instructive element of a character's speech. Let him hint to us by the manner of his talk what sort of a man he is. When he has informed us of that, we then wish only to be told what he does and how he reacts to the story.

Speech Labels.

Instead of describing the manner of a person's speech as "he said" and "she said," the young author should select numerous terms to describe the manner in which the character speaks and the emotion under which he labors. For instance, variations of "he said" are: he explained, inquired, interrogated, cackled, piped-up, stormed, snarled, suggested, hinted, insisted, gave back, answered, informed, intimated, murmured, retorted, ejaculated, protested, and so on. To have the variations in the manner of speech readily at hand, the writer will be wise to make a list of synonymous expressions and learn them thoroughly. They will help in marking out more vividly the speech of the characters. The writer should observe closely also the manner in which other writers label their speeches and profit therefrom.

We are appending four examples of dialogue the first two from Thackeray's "Vanity Fair." Thackeray has the enviable

reputation for writing more natural dialogue than any other writer. The third example is from Kipling's "Mulvaney" series, and is given to show how far one may go in giving dialect. The last one, from O. Henry, shows that slang may be free from all vulgarity and still be replete with humor.

* * * * * * * *

"It's only your sister, Joseph," said Amelia, shaking the two fingers which he held out. "I've come home *for good,* you know; and this is my friend, Miss Sharp, whom you have heard me mention."

"No, never, upon my word," said the head under the neck-cloth, shaking very much,—"that is, yes—what abominably cold weather Miss;"—and herewith he fell to poking the fire with all his might although it was in the middle of June.

"He's very handsome," whispered Rebecca to Amelia, rather loud.

"Do you think so?" said the latter. "I'll tell him."

"Darling! not for worlds," said Miss Sharp, starting back timid as a faun. She had previously made a respectful virgin-like curtsey to the gentleman, and her modest eyes gazed so perseveringly on the carpet that it was a wonder how she should have found an opportunity to see him.

"Thank you for the beautiful shawls, brother," said Amelia to the fire poker. "Are they not beautiful, Rebecca?"

"O heavenly!" said Miss Sharp, and her eyes went from the carpet straight to the chandelier.

Joseph still continued a huge clattering at the poker and tongs, puffing and blowing the while, and turning as red as his yellow face would allow him.

"I can't make you such handsome presents, Joseph," continued his sister, "but while I was at school I have embroidered you a very beautiful pair of braces."

"Good Gad! Amelia," cried the brother, in serious alarm, "what do you mean?" and plunging with all his might at the bell-rope, that article of furniture came away in his hand, and increased the honest fellow's confusion. "For heaven's sake see

if my buggy's at the door. I *can't* wait. I must go. D—— that groom of mine. I must go."

* * * * * * * *

"I wish you'd remember other things as well, sir," the sire answered. "I wish you'd remember that in this house—so long as you choose to honor it with your company, Captain—I'm the master, and that name, and that that—that you—that I say——"

"That what, sir?" George asked, with scarcely a sneer, filling another glass of claret.

"——!" burst out his father with a screaming oath—"that the name of those Sedleys never be mentioned here, sir—not one of the whole damned lot of 'em, sir."

"It wasn't I, sir, that introduced Miss Sedley's name. It was my sisters who spoke ill of her to Miss Swartz; and by Jove I'll defend her wherever I go. Nobody shall speak lightly of that name in my presence. Our family has done her quite enough injury already, I think, and may leave off reviling her now she's down. I'll shoot any man but you who says a word against her."

"Go on, sir, go on," the old gentleman said, his eyes starting out of his head.

"Go on about what, sir? about the way in which we've treated that angel of a girl? Who told me to love her? It was your doing. I might have chosen elsewhere, and looked higher, perhaps, than your society; but I obeyed you. And now that her heart's mine you give me orders to fling it away, and punish her, kill her perhaps—for the faults of other people. It's a shame, by Heavens," said George, working himself up into passion and enthusiasm as he proceeded, "to play at fast and loose with a young girl's affections—and with such an angel as that—one so superior to the people amongst whom she lived, that she might have excited envy, only she was so good and gentle, that it's a wonder anybody dared to hate her. If I desert her, sir, do you suppose she forgets me?"

"I ain't going to have any of this damn sentimental nonsense and humbug here, sir," the father cried out. "There shall be no beggar-marriages in my family. If you choose to fling away eight thousand a year, which you may have for the asking, you

may do it; but by Jove you take your pack and walk out of this house, sir. Will you do as I tell you, once for all, sir, or will you not?"

"Marry that mulatto woman?" George said, pulling up his shirt collar. "I don't like the color, sir. Ask the black that sweeps opposite Fleet Market, sir. I'm not going to marry a Hottentot Venus."

Mr. Osborne pulled frantically at the cord by which he was accustomed to summon the butler when he wanted wine—and almost black in the face, ordered that functionary to call a coach for Captain Osborne.

"I've done it," said George, coming into the Slaughters' an hour afterwards, looking very pale.

"What, my boy?" says Dobbin.

George told what had passed between his father and himself.

"I'll marry her to-morrow," he said with an oath. "I love her more every day, Dobbin."

* * * * * * * *

"Eyah! They was great times. I'm ould now; me hide's wore off in patches; sinthrygo has disconceited me, an' I'm a married man tu. But I've had my day—I've had my day, an' nothin' can take away the taste av that! Oh my time past, whin I put me fut through ivry livin' wan av the Tin Commandmints between Revelly and Lights Out, blew the froth off a pewter, wiped me moustache wid the back av me hand, an' slept on ut all as quiet as a little child! But ut's over—ut's over, an' 'twill niver come back to me; not though I prayed for a week av Sundays. Was there any wan in the Ould Rig'mint to touch Corp'ril Terence Mulvaney whin that same was turned out for sedukshin? I niver met him. Ivry woman that was not a witch was worth the runnin' afther in those days, an' ivry man was my dearest frind or—I had stripped to him an' we knew which was the betther av the tu."

* * * * * * * *

"Cheese it," said the Captain harshly. "I'm not hogging it yet. It's all on the outside. I went around on Essex and proposed marriage to that Catrina that's got the fruit shop there.

Now, that business could be built up. She's a peach as far as a Dago could be. I thought I had that senoreena mashed sure last week. But look what she done to me! I guess I got too fresh. Well, there's another scheme queered."

"You don't mean to say," said Murray, with infinite contempt, "that you would have married that woman to help yourself out of your disgraceful troubles!"

"Me," said the Captain. "I'd marry the Empress of China for one bowl of chop suey. I'd commit murder for a plate of beef stew. I'd steal a wafer from a waif. I'd be a Mormon for a bowl of chowder."

"I think," said Murray, resting his head on his hands, "that I would play Judas for the price of one drink of whiskey. For thirty pieces of silver I would——"

"Oh, come now!" exclaimed the Captain in dismay. "You wouldn't do that, Murray? I always thought that Kike's squeal on his boss was about the lowest-down play that ever happened. A man that gives his friend away is worse than a pirate."

Chapter VIII

SETTING

Setting in a story is the time, place, and conditions under which the action of the story transpires. Setting bears the same relation to the story that the sound drum bears to the Victrola. In both cases, the lack of the developing feature of setting and sound drum will detract greatly from the final impression of the story and the music.

Dramas originally were given practically with no setting whatsoever. The old morality plays were very crude affairs indeed with regard to scenic effects and costuming of the actors. The spectator required a very sympathetic and enthusiastic nature to accept the plays as they were presented. In our modern dramas and musical comedies, however, everything is changed. The stage managers of the various companies vie with each other in setting their plays in veritable dreams of splendor. The characters are gowned as prince and princess born to the purple, while all settings of whatever kind are drawn with an eye to a certain effect in view. The settings are planned, above all else, to be always in tone with the theme of the story as well as the tone of each particular situation.

Through the proper use of setting, the short story and drama have been developed to the present distinguished and cogent standards. Some stories require only enough setting to give stability and to assist in the ultimate unity of impression desired. This is the case in stories based on character or incident. In such stories the setting must not interfere with the characters and situations in which they become involved; and, even though a story be one of setting, the writer should be very careful that he does not introduce setting for setting's sake alone, but has

rather a definite predetermined object in view in every place and condition described; otherwise, his story will lag and become wearisome.

Setting in a story should be given, in so far as possible, suggestively. Thus, the writer may say that the countenances of those present were blanched to a deadly white by the spectre which met their eyes.

The more lifelike and concrete a setting can be made the more believable and credible will be the resulting story. The tales of old usually began with "Once upon a time." They might have occurred anywhere and at any time. This is perhaps one of the main reasons why such stories have an air of utter improbability. We do not know where they occurred. We have no idea of location. We are in a quandary as to under what conditions the action took place; hence, our imagination is given a very severe and, in some cases, disastrous test. Either through direct narrative description or by the speech of his characters, the writer should give definitely the setting of his story. In the following paragraph, the initial one in O. Henry's "The Whirligig of Life," the author thus briefly summarizes the setting:

"Justice of the Peace, Renaja Weddup, sat in the door of his office. Halfway of the zenith the Cumberland range rose blue-gray in the afternoon haze. A speckled hen swaggered down the main street of the "settlement,' cackling foolishly."

Emotion in the Setting.

Man is acted upon by the nature of his surroundings. Think to yourself of the effect that certain localities, through the passage of years, have grown to hold upon you. The sight of a certain faraway range of mountains will bring certain trains of thought into your mind. Certain impulses may suddenly spring up at the smell of a flower or the sound of a chime ringing; the impulses thus precipitated may influence radically the events of your life for a long time afterward.

Suppose, for instance, that you had lived for years in a certain hilly country; that your home nestled in a pretty little valley

which you had grown to love and regard as part of your very being. To continue with the hypothesis, you had always lived among friends who were congenial, sympathetic, and who understood your very moods. Consider your feelings, then, if, by force of circumstances, you were suddenly snatched away from your sleepy little town among the hills and were drawn into the roaring maw of a huge city, where you saw no loving face, met no friend to speak a cheering word, and where all was strange and new. Do you not think such a new life might have radical bearing on your thoughts and actions? Might you not in moments of desperation do things foreign to your past self?

This goes to show the effect invironment has on the individual. How strong a hold it has gained upon an individual may be determined largely by the manner in which his nature reacts to environment. The nature of one's surroundings has a direct bearing, too, upon one's own feelings. When Old Sol smiles, man is very apt to do likewise. When gloom and chill settle over the earth, people are very apt to reflect nature's new tone and sob with her in downcast moods.

Emotional Contrast in Setting.

Certain settings are often used as a means of bringing out by contrast an opposite feeling or condition in the character. Thus, a character may be under strain of poignant grief. He may be drinking the dregs of utter despondency. To emphasize this character's feelings, the writer may describe the landscape and nature's various manifestations as being peaceful and tranquil. The same holds true for the opposite. Man may be happy and satisfied, while all around him the elements roar forth their anger.

Setting as Determining the Incidents.

Setting includes all the elements of a person's environment, all the elements of nature, of social and occupational life, business, professional, and so forth. Hence, according as a person's relation to a certain condition of setting is accentuated,

so is the story determined by the setting. If I am employed in, say, a telegraph office, my actions, the people whom I meet, the doings of the day, the thoughts that come to me, are largely predetermined by the very limitations of the occupation in which I am engaged.

Stevenson says regarding the influence of setting on incident:

> There are, so far as I know, three ways, and three ways only, of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly you may take a certain atmosphere and get action and persons to express and realize it. I'll give you an example in "The Merry Men." There I began with the feeling of one of those islands on the west coast of Scotland, and I gradually developed the story to express the sentiment with which the coast affected me.
>
> One thing in life calls for another; there is a fitness in events and places. The sight of a pleasant arbor puts it in our mind to sit in it. One place suggests work, another idleness, a third early rising and rambles in the dew. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something we feel should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. And many of the happiest hours of life fleet by us in the vain attendance on the genius of the place and moment. It is thus that tracts of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, particularly torture and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps, ages back, to members of my race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate games for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story. Some places speak distinctly. Certain dark gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck. Other spots again seem to abide their destiny, suggestive and impenetrable.

Influence of Setting on Character.

Man, as has already been announced, is a creature of his environment. His aspect on life very likely will be colored by the setting in which he is placed. Zola, the French novelist, for instance, was reprimanded by Brunetière, a French critic, for describing one of his characters as moved by the various colors mirrored in a pool of water before his house. The critic did not think it was lifelike to have a man influenced by such a trivial circumstance, but Zola and his contemporaries were more acute analyzers of the effect setting has on character.

The business in which we are engaged, the places we visit, the things we have, all are extremely vital in determining our course of action in life. Change one and you vary the individual for a day; change them all and your personage will experience an entirely different outlook upon life. For instance, if a man is a minister, he may, by mere nature of his occupation and by no sense of morality inherent in him, be expected to act differently under certain circumstances than would a person of some other profession if placed under like conditions.

The Part the Weather Plays in a Story.

If the writer will reflect for but a moment, he will recall what a vast number of stories of adventure or incident were founded on some phase of weather; upon a thunder-shower, a cyclone, a snow-storm of the Dakota type, or a sand-storm of the desert. A typical instance of this sort is Conrad's story of the sea, "The Typhoon." If the writer has sufficient command of words to portray the sounds of the elements in distress, he has at his beck and call a very effective means of entertainment. Stories of storms or of the weather contain unlimited possibilities.

Local Color.

Artists especially noted for the distinct tincture of local color that their stories contain are: Bret Harte and Hamlin Garland,

whose stories portray the life and manners of the West and middle West; Cable, whose stories are of the intimate southland; Mary Wilcox Freeman, whose characters portray the tone and atmosphere of quaint New England life, and so on. The stories of these and such writers are distinguished because of the local color which they introduce into their stories. They give the tone, the atmosphere, the concentrated meaning of the locality of which they write. Their stories portray effectively and unmistakably the domestic tones and distinguishing features of certain localities. All details of setting are selected in such a manner as to bring out the spirit and the pervading atmosphere of the place, while all details which do not assist in the unity of impression are rigidly suppressed.

Chapter IX

STYLE

As the French academician observed, "Style is the Man." Style in writing is just as true a portrayal of what a man is—how his texture of thought is woven together—as are the actions of his life. Style is a particular method of writing and no two men are gifted with the same method, just as no two people are alike. Style is a garb of many colors, a thing of many constituents. Stories may be told in a multitude of styles. Thus, a story's style may be elegant, awkward, smooth, dull, involved, ornate, poetical, simple, melodious, and so forth, all depending on the individual who impresses on it the inevitable stamp of personality. Style is like a mirror; it reflects exactly the peculiarities of each detail of its master. If a man be nervous temperamentally his style is sure to reflect those characteristics, and very likely will be choppy and uneven in many places. A writer of nervous temperament, too, is quite likely to have a versatile style, one possessing many different qualities.

But it is not necessary to go into a technical discussion of the elements that constitute all the various kinds of style; such a discussion belongs to the realm of rhetoric. It will be necessary only to sketch lightly the main and salient features of style, for it is true that the better the style of the story, the more pleasure will it give to the reader.

Yet, it is the truth that present-day stories have very little, if any, style. Out of the hundreds of stories that appear monthly in all our vast number of periodicals, but few can be said to possess a good style. Compare any of the stories which you may read in current magazines with some of the stories of Henry van Dyke, the master dictionist, whose style is as limpid and smooth-

flowing as the water in a sand-bottomed brook. But perhaps just because of the fact that so many accepted stories lack good style, the writer will decide not to bother greatly about the elements of style. The writer may determine that question for himself. If he does not care to develop a distinctive and beautiful style, it may not much matter in the long run. Still, all stories must be told clearly, simply, and smoothly. The words of the story must be such as to bring forth mental images to the mind of the reader. Only so far as it is necessary to accomplish these things must the writer study style. The supreme duty of every story writer is to make himself understood absolutely. To write clearly and without equivocation, and to write in such a manner that not one bit of doubt arises in the reader's mind as to what the author means, is a great task as well as a great duty.

In real life O. Henry was a quietly humorous and observing individual, bubbling over with good-fellowship and taking a great joy in recording the characteristic oddities of people in general. The following extract from one of his stories will reveal his humorous outlook on life. It is a fine example of the statement, "Style is the man."

> "A trust is its weakest point," said Jeff Peters.
>
> "That," said I, "sounds like one of those unintelligible remarks such as, 'Why is a policeman?'"
>
> "It is not," said Jeff. "There are no relations between a trust and a policeman. My remark was an epigram—an axis—a kind of mulct'em in parvo. What it means is that a trust is like an egg. If you want to break an egg you have to do it from the outside. The only way to break up a trust is from the inside. Keep sitting on it until it hatches. Look at the brood of young colleges and libraries that's chirping and peeping all over the country. Yes, sir, every trust bears in its own bosom the seeds of its destruction like a rooster that crows near a Georgia colored Methodist camp meeting, or a Republican announcing himself a candidate for governor of Texas."

To be certain rearding the qualities of pure, distinctive style the writer should make a study of the diction of several of the master writers such as Dickens, Stevenson, Addison, Kipling, Poe, Hawthorne, Conrad and so forth, comparing their style with his and ending up by striving to imitate their peculiarities of writing. In this way he may be assisted in his choice of words. Of a like method of self-improvement Stevenson says:

"Whenever I read a book or a page that particularly pleased me in which a thing was said or effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style I must sit down at once to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful, and always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in contruction and co-ordination of parts.

"I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wadsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne.

"That, like it or not, is the way to learn to write; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. It was the way Keats learned, and there never was a finer temperament for literature than Keats."

Style varies according to the type of story to be written. Thus, in a story of swift, continuous action, the style should consist of short, forceful sentences. All ornamentation, figures of speech, and the like, should be eliminated for all must center around the tempestuous onrush of events. If the story is one of mystery or tragedy, the style should lean to the choice of words in which the feeling of fear or horror is aroused. Thus, in Poe's story, "The Fall of the House of Usher," his sentence structure and his choice of words are such that sensations of mystery and apprehension are produced, which sensations come not entirely from the fact that the story deals with elements of the supernatural. Again, in Poe's story "Ligeia," the style or choice of words plays a prominent part in bringing out tones of melancholy.

The Three Qualities of Style.

Clearness.—To arouse emotion in the reader, the style must appeal clearly to particular senses, tastes, passions, and so on, for a clear appeal to any one of our five senses invariably arouses some emotion. In clearness of style are included clearness of thought and clearness of expression. We must think a thing clearly before we can express it well. To be intelligible the writer's every sentence must contain ideas clearly and logically related to each other.

As an important assistance to clearness, adverbs, adjectives, and pronouns should be placed carefully to modify the words and antecedents to which they are most vitally related.

Force.—When a writer wishes to be impressive, to be emphatic, to arouse emotion, and to stress sensational situations, he employs a forceful style. As Professor Genung observes:

"As related to the writer himself, force in style is the result and evidence of some strong emotion at work infusing vigor into his words. He realizes vividly the truth of what he says and so it becomes intense and fervid; he has a deep conviction of its importance, and so it becomes cogent and impressive. Along with this fervor of feeling his will is enlisted; he is determined, as it were, to make his reader think as he does and to make his cause prevail. Every employment of word and figure is tributary to this. Genuine force in style cannot be manufactured; if the style has not serious conviction to back it, it becomes contorted; if it has no vivifying emotion, it becomes turgid. Force is the quality of style most dependent on character."

To impart force the writer should use only those words which indicate strength, which imply bigness or swiftness of movement. He should eliminate carefully all merely superficial adjectives and adverbs so that the sentences carry the thought effectively. Force in the sentence is inherent in the sentence's arrangement. To employ a maximum of force, the main idea in a sentence should be arranged culminatingly so that it comes at the end of the sentence.

Beauty.—Beauty means making the story a thing of delight to the ear, mind, sense of proportion, and so on. It means the elimination of all harsh words and combination of words. The use of melodious words, of alliterative words, of suggestive words, such as, "murmuring" and "clash," having a strong resemblance in sound to the idea they express, are practices which lend to the beautification of a work. Lastly in the element of beauty comes the use of figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, personification, etc.

Chapter X

UNITIES OF TIME, PLACE AND ACTION

Unity of Time.

Ordinarily, the plot of the short story is based on a sequence of events culminating in a single crisis in the life of one person. A novel might deal with several such crises in the life of one individual, for very few persons pass through only one; or the novel may be so involved as to encompass the crises in the lives of several personages. In the short story, however, this is not allowable, as its purpose is to reproduce a single and critical phase in the life of a solitary character. This crisis of the character may be treated in detail, or otherwise, according to how many words the story is to contain.

It is absolutely necessary that the short story be limited in its reproduction of life; otherwise, it will not leave an unified impression; no particular theme will be brought out with a definiteness of outline, for it would be impossible to choose haphazardly from the chaotic welter of life a series of incidents leading consistently to the intelligible illustration of some truth. No lesson could be learned from it, no theme elaborated. Hence, the short story must embrace not only a sequence of events, well-balanced and chosen to set forth a theme, but must likewise be closely bound together by unity of time.

We remember best those things that happen one after the other in point of time. We receive thusly a continuous picture, for the events that occur are all intimately akin; they have a singleness of purpose which imprints its meaning firmly upon the memory. And, when the various events composing a story follow each other closely in point of time, the illusion is

more real, for all life is a constantly flowing stream of action and incident.

This, then, affords sufficient reason why the author should weave the incidents of his plot closely together in point of time. It is not necessary to show the hero in his early boyhood, and to reveal how, while yet a young boy, he was fascinated by the girl he eventually marries. Nor is it necessary to draw out a courtship through all the mazes of the wooing, proposal, preparations for marriage, honeymoon, and so on. The story should commence where the first incident of themic significance begins and where the crisis of the main character—the crisis chosen for the story—is inaugurated. We are not interested in knowing about all the past events which have contributed to making up a person's character. But we are curious to know what his present character is; we may even desire a few summary hints as to what events contributed to his present situation and outlook on life, such as: "Channing had not accepted the rebuffs of life philosophically; they had left him suspicious, sarcastic, cynical."

The author should choose those subjects which can be handled without the introduction of great lapses of time, years in length, and recurring at frequent intervals. The proper length of time for the characters to act out the story's action ordinarily is not more than one or two years, but very many of them do not consume more than a day or two, or even an hour. The greater the compression of time in the story, the stronger will be the impression of unity left with the reader; and unity of impression is what the author is striving for.

In some stories, on the other hand, the passage of many years and the emphasis of time are the very things from which the story draws its effectiveness. In De Maupassant's story, "The Necklace," the mere mention of the ten years and all they signify to the main characters is appalling indeed. It is from this relatively great length of time in the life of the two characters that the story derives its significance. In stories dealing with, or stressing, the passage of numbers of years, the beginner has but a poor chance of dealing adequately with the subject

chosen. Stories of this character usually are stories of purpose or of idea.

Such a one is Björnstjerne Björnson's, "The Father." The story relates, in graphic simplicity and nakedness of decorative qualities, the self-centered love of the father for his son. This is the story spoken of in a previous chapter. We introduce extracts showing the passage of time.

"The man whose story is here to be told was the wealthiest and most influential person in his parish; his name was Thord Overaas. He appeared in the priest's study one day, tall and earnest.

" 'I have got a son,' said he, 'and I wish to present him for baptism.'

* * * "One day sixteen years later, Thord stood once more in the priest's study.

" 'I have come this evening about that son of mine who is to be confirmed to-morrow.' * * *

"Eight years more rolled by and then one day a noise was heard outside of the priest's study, for many men were approaching, and at their head was Thord, who entered first. * * *

" 'I am here to request the the banns may be published for my son: he is about to marry Karen Storliden, daughter of Gudmund, who stands here beside me.'

* * * "A fortnight later, the father and son were rowing across the lake. * * *

"The Son threw out his arms, uttered a shriek and fell overboard. * * *

* * * "For three days and three nights people saw the father rowing round and round the spot, without taking either food or sleep. * * *

"It must have been a year from that day." * * *

Unity of Place.

The average reader finds it far easier to accept the passage of time, to comprehend the lapse of one or several years between the time required to take up the thread of the story

where it was dropped, than to imagine a change of scene. Thus, after the writer has mentioned that ten years have passed, it is not necessary then that the story be resumed in different scenes: rather it should be resumed in surroundings similar to those in which it was broken off.

To accept a change of scene requires a great mental exercise. If all changes of scene in a story demanding several shifts in locality are important, then it will be necessary to sketch them with some clarity. The reader is thus forced to a great mental strain in order to assimilate all the details of the varied scenes; his interest becomes diffused; he becomes conscious of himself; his concentration is scattered; his tale of amusement has become an exercise of memory.

The wise author, then, will let his characters act within the smallest possible area consistent with a fitting elaboration of his theme. This may be one or two places or more, but preferably as few as possible. Of course there are some scenes in which very important events transpire, and in which the elements of setting have a peculiar effect on the actions of the characters. Such a locality must be sketched in with some detail and care. But, once the reader has mastered this scene, he should not be hurried on to another which is described with just as much particularity. If such is the case, the story will contain far too much description. Consequently, the very best method the author can employ in imparting unity of place to his works is to describe with some definiteness only the one or two main settings of his story and bring the characters back to these settings as often as possible. At each return to one of these main scenes it will be necessary only to mention the setting; the reader will already have formed a mental picture of the place, hence will be under no necessity of further thinking effort in order to establish the location.

The writer must ever bear in mind that the reader desires to become identified with the characters of the story; therefore, the constant intrusion of the writer who forces the reader to tear his attention from the consuming interest of the action

of the story to the mere setting in which the various incidents take place, is aggravating in the extreme.

Let there be only a very few scenes sketched in detail; it will be sufficient to leave the other changes to the imagination of the reader himself by leaving the details of the background indefinite. If the hero goes to church, merely mention the church; the reader has his own type of church in mind, and it would be merely a waste of time on the author's part, as well as a distraction for the reader, to tell of what materials the church was composed. And, if no important events transpire in the heroine's home, it is again of no particular advantage to describe the various trappings and drapings that compose the sitting-room.

Most people greatly enjoy travel; they like to visit foreign countries. They love to wonder at the beauty of far-off climes, to hear new sounds and smell strange, entrancing perfumes. But novelty of change comes easily through the eye, which immediately registers a picture on the brain without any effort on the part of the individual. To visualize a change of scene, however, is a much different matter; for the ordinary individual, it requires a distinct effort. The author, then, may easily imagine what pleasure a person might extract from a tale constantly interspersed with detailed descriptions of place and condition. So let the author decide to fasten upon two or three main localities to carry on his story; let the reader know those particular places well and even learn to love them; but let the writer merely mention all over changes of scenes as changes only. For example, "The forest," "On the way home," "He took dinner at the inn," and "They toiled up the mountain."

Unity of Action.

A story, to possess unity of action, must be concerned only with one main crisis of a character's life; therefore, it obviously is not within the ability of the short story to delineate the slow development of a character and to give the numerous incidents which ordinarily influence him to one state of mind or another.

The slow development or gradual degeneration of character requires the larger scope of the novel for adequate treatment. Hence, the writer should avoid writing the story which portrays the deliberate growth of character, or involves a change in character requiring the passage of years and the influence of innumerable incidents to bring it about clearly and satisfactorily.

To insure unity of action, be sure to exclude all incidents which do not directly contribute to the approach and accomplishment of the main crisis. This includes the extinction of all sub-plots and extraneous characters, as well as all bits of setting and characterizations not having the realization of the theme constantly in view. Do not think to heighten the suspense or draw out the interest by introducing little sideshows into the story texture. They inevitably detract from the main issue of the plot; the story ends without having imparted a single impression; the theme of the plot misfires, and the reader has no single or dominant view of life to take away with him. Subplots, rather than adding to the interest in the main trend, or strand, of the plot, invariably dissipate that interest. The secret of success in the short story, then, is simplicity rather than complication and involved artfulness—simplicity in the number of characters, in the emotions which the characters experience, in change of scene, number of incidents, course of time, and so on.

By some strange and unexplainable twist of fate, people in general have been led to believe that the way of the story teller is very devious indeed; that he deals in strange concoctions of endless constituents. It is true that the elements with which he deals are many—for his realm is that of Life, the world—but his subject for each single story is only a very infinitesimal atom of existence, handled to bring out some phase of life helpfully, interestingly, and intelligibly to the rest of the world.

Chapter XI

UNITY OF IMPRESSION

Unity of impression presupposes unity of conception, deep sympathy with the story and its characters and the maintenance of a general tone throughout. A story may progress logically, swiftly, and clearly from the preliminary situation right through to the conclusion, without halt or hesitation; it may be a model of well-balanced short-story structure; it may be a delight for the contemplation of a critical analyzer, yet fall short of conviction and impressionistic qualities.

In other words, there is a higher law in story writing than that of mere mathematics; there is a larger aim than a strict adherence to certain rules regarding the order of events, plot construction, characters, title, and so on. That final test of the artist in short-story writing deals with unity of impression, of imparting a certain distinctive tone or spirit to the story, according to the purpose of the author and the emotion predominant in the story. Unity of impression gives a story character, imparts to it a certain individuality that should cling to the memory of the reader long after he has absorbed the story's last word.

Some people have distinguished talents or traits which particularly endear them to us. One man may be very engaging of manner, while another person may be the personification of hospitality. Those traits stand out above all others in those particular individuals. It is by those traits that they are loved and respected.

So it is with stories, based, as they may be, on a thousand different variations of emotions, characters, incidents, tones, colors, ideas, philosophies—illimitable. Each story, based upon

some special emotion or idea, should be permeated with that emotion throughout; that emotion should stand out strongly through every major and even minor event of the plot as it progresses. It implies unity of mood throughout the story, unity of mood at the start, in the middle, and right up to the final reckoning.

Author Must Have the Tone of His Story Constantly Before Him.

It is necessary above all else that, in securing unity of impression, the author have the dominant tone of his story ever before him, so that every event and every situation be touched with it, and that every word set down be an indispensable link in the chain reaching from causation to effect. Of this effect of unity of impression to be wrought in the manuscript, Robert Louis Stevenson says:

"A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his initial sentence tend not to the out-bringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written to which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preëstablished design."

The author should go over in his mind each incident of his story before setting it to paper and determine if each one is impregnated with the spirit of a certain mood. If not, then he must ruthlessly cast it aside; it certainly will not aid in securing unity of impression; for, to bring about this desired effect, every event must be inevitable to the clear working out of the plot and must be in mood with all the rest of the plot-fabric.

A master in the device of securing imcomparable impressionistic qualities was Poe. In his story, "The Masque of the Red Death," all bits of the setting, and even seemingly insignicant fragments of the story have been considered for their

harmony of mood. The mood is one of mystery and tragedy which comes to a band of thoughtless revellers. The tone of the story is brought more sharply in contrast by the gayety of the party. Poe strikes the tone of death and tragedy in the very first sentence of the story. I will give passages from the story to illustrate how well Poe has the mood in hand and what materials he utilizes to bring it to the reader impressively.

> The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. * * *
>
> But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.
>
> It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceeding musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation. * * *
>
> The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. * * * But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. * * *

* * * And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flame of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

In Poe's story, " The Fall of the House of Usher," the unity of impression is wrought out in like manner. Every element of setting is permeated with the inextinguishable and gripping breath of the supernatural; from beginning to end the whole story fairly reeks of it, and the reader cannot leave the story without carrying with him a singleness of impression.

Why Enthusiasm is Essential.

A prime requisite for the obtaining of unity of impression is that the writer be enthused with his materials; that is, be overjoyed with the prospect of writing a story of a certain type. Thus, a person may experience a keen delight in reading and writing of a courageous, generous, resourceful man who is involved in very strenuous and complicated happenings, who plays the part of worshipper to beautiful woman; whose stirring efforts are crowned with success after very persistent fighting and continuous combat with forces of evil; who, in fact, is the very type of "hero" so dear to the hearts of those who are charmed especially by the moving story of action. If the author delights in writing stories of stirring adventure, then he inevitably will approach his subject with a certain avidity to be at it and to start his characters off on their perilous voyages. And, throughout the whole narrative, he will deal with his characters and their troubles, their loves and their triumphs, in a tender, enthusiastic manner; he will be one with them in spirit and body; he will give himself entirely unto them; and, dominated by the one supreme purpose of injecting inspiriting and dashing contention into his story, he will have no end but one in view—to make his hero a hero above all others, to make his heroine

admired and loved and feared for as no other ever has been. And, in so doing, he will forget to digress; he will have no desire to philosophize on some extraneous matter of small assistance to the ultimate achievement of the climax. Every incident, every bit of setting and of character, will be devised with the purpose of making the hero more heroic, of bringing out some trait, such as courage, so that when the story has been drawn to its conclusion the reader will know, without doubt or conscious thinking effort, that some particular emotion has been very decidedly aroused and that that emotion has been pleasurable.

Another writer, however, will not wish to write adventure stories. He is not in spirit with a Stevenson, a Dumas, a Scott. If he should write an adventure story, no particular emotion would be aroused in the reader, for the writer himself would not be sufficiently possessed of any single dominant emotion to be brought out in the story, to impart anything of distinction to the story; it would be merely a stilted performance of puppets with no surging battles to fight, no great ideals to contest wholeheartedly for.

But this same writer might have a preference for the character story. If so, in such a story would his desires best be displayed in unity of impression. He might have in view the reaction of some character to temptation as brought against a certain strong sense of duty—the temptation, or its indulgence, and the duty running toward exactly different ends. The dominant tone of such a story would be the portrayal of the hero's struggle with self.

And so on. From which it is seen that before unity of impression may successfully be attained, the writer must be informed unmistakably of just what tone he wishes to render, and this may be determined by the kind of story to be written, together with the effect to be rendered.

The Reader's Acceptance of the Author's Dominant Tone.

Some people's dreams are as real as the things that make up their every-day life. Even their imaginings and fancies possess

an air of reality, which, when viewed in retrospect, may seem to be recollections of actual experiences. Such people will write admirable stories drawn entirely from the imagination. They will believe in their stories; they will give themselves up without reserve to their elaboration; the story will possess, then, a tone of sincerity and unity of impression.

Take, for example, the ghost story; the beginner is advised against writing of the supernatural or the mysterious if he is too out-and-out a disbeliever in anything which smacks of the unreal; if he cannot be tolerant of the supernatural even for amusement's sake. For such a person to write a ghost story would bear an analogy to the mathematician touching his figures with an element of romance. He could not do so and retain confidence in his subject. I speak of this with regard especially to the ghost story, for the reason that just exactly the same error has been made in the past. Anne Radcliff in her novel, "The Castle of Otronto," attempts to explain the mysterious sights and sounds which impart such a delightful atmosphere of mystery and expectancy to most of her books, by resorting to the discovery of some mechanical device that caused the noises and the strange sights. The effect is not to be mistaken. Very evidently the author did not think that the reader would care to accept the strange events of her story without the proverbial grain of salt; yet, in administering the salt she has spoiled the effect of the story entirely. A writer anxious to give his story unity of impression would have left the cause of the mystery unexplained in such a disappointing and prosaic fashion.

The average reader dislikes exceedingly to be disappointed when he has taken it for granted he is to be pleased. And, if a certain personage of a story is especially pleasing to the reader, if this person's conduct and nature is of such caliber as to endear him more and more to the reader as the story progresses, then the reader is going to be a discomfited and enraged individual indeed if affairs turn out badly for the beloved. Hence arises this rule: If the expectations are aroused in a certain direction, that direction must be maintained undeviatingly throughout. If the story is to be one of light and airy

romance, it must not end in tragedy; while, on the other hand, if the story is to be one of melancholy, it must not possess too prominent and disquieting strains of joyous humor, for then the contrast will be too strongly sketched and the reader will not know what effect was to be rendered.

The author, then, from the first sentence, if necessary, must strike the dominant tone and emotion of his story, just as Shakespeare did in Hamlet and in all the rest of his plays. Throughout some run the deep, persistent tones of tragedy, offset only here and there with swift, expert, running touches of peace, quiet, and humor, by bits of appropriate contrast, yet not sufficient to detract or throw the reader from the pervading tone. Another sketches the humorous character of an alehouse, say the laughable Falstaff; and, in such a one, Shakespeare does not make the mistake of startling the reader by introducing tragic tones.

Every Story Must Be Distinctive.

It will be well to recall to the prospective writer at just this point a certain state of mind peculiar to the average reader. The reader, as a rule, is a very generous sort of person; if he votes to read an impossible tale of romance, of fantasy or of adventure, he is ready heart and soul for the very worst the author is able to do with his characters, provided, of course, that the characters remain true to type and do not perform out "of character" or as humans might be expected to conduct themselves. In the act of starting a particular story and going ahead with it, the reader tentatively agrees to accompany the author upon any cruise of fate, to whatsoever climes the story may carry him; he is eagerly prepared for the highest flights of fancy, provided the reader strikes that tone from the outset and gives the reader assurance that the story is one of fancy and will not, without warning, change into a domestic tragedy.

To bring out this point more strongly, let us compare two stories, both romantic in a general sort of way and both containing the element of love. We will consider "Aladdin's Lamp,"

from the Arabian Nights, and "The House Opposite," a tale in dialogue by Anthony Hope.

In the former production, the reader accepts the wonderful adventures of Aladdin as a matter of course. It is no matter of surprise to the reader, after he has been informed of the tone of the story, to be told that at the mere rubbing of the wonderful lamp genii appeared to carry out the most extravagant demands of their master; we are prepared for all that comes and even take a delight in anticipating even more marvelous happenings. Nothing the hero could do or could have done to him would surprise us in the least, for we are momentarily expecting some genii to appear and perform still greater feats. Nor do we lay the story aside, having finished its perusal after an hour of pleasurable emotions, with any feeling of disgust or shame. Of course, we do not imagine for an instant that any such miracles could take place or ever did. Yet we admitted, during the actual reading, that they might, and in that silent agreement with the author did we read his production.

In the other production, "The House Opposite," is brought out a little characteristic peculiar to most people: that of forgetting the romance of their earlier days after they have become settled down to the staid humdrum of house and home. This story deals very delightfully, very humanly, in a manner very true to life, with just this trait of character.

The action is unusually trivial. A young lady slips out of her boarding school and meets by chance a young man who resides in "The House Opposite," a young man she has seen before and often silently admired. The two go to a soda fountain where the heroine spends a shilling given her to attend a certain lecture. Everything is very commonplace, very plausible, very like happenings that might and doubtless do occur many times during the lifetime of every individual. The tone throughout is quiet, humorous, and romantic.

Now consider in what a stupefied condition the reader would be hurled if, during the stroll of the two young people down the street in the direction of the soda fountain, there should have appeared three horrible, distorted genii who should have

demanded that they be asked to perform some incredible feat. Would the reader accept it; would he be likely to go on with the story? If he did, it would be with the intention of seeing just what was the matter with the author and of ascertaining if further marks of insanity could be discovered.

The Importance of Setting in Unity of Impression.

Of inestimable importance in imparting unity of impression and emphasizing the key of the story is setting. For stories of action or incident, there is no better setting than the deep forest, the raging flood, the sea, the city's streets in the dead of night, the battlefield, and so on.

For stories of romance the appropriate background is the dance perfumes, flowers, moonlit evenings, gardens, the female in distress, preferably in some suggestive and stirring place, the lake steamer, the canoe, and so on in unlimited variation. All such devices of setting tend to give the impression of love, of the tender heart, of susceptible emotions, for it is through our senses that we are most visibly affected. We all have heard, doubtless many of us have felt, the subtle influence of the moon on a summer's balmy evening.

It is for these reasons that the harmonized elements of setting are so invaluable. The reader can be made to accept the tone of a story far more readily when there exists no incongruous elements of setting, when the author has not been so careless as to lay his tale of romance in too uninviting and meaningless a location. Just consider for a moment how the story of mystery, of dark and unfathomable doings, can be strengthened in suspense and emotional height by the introduction of the moaning wind, the dashing waves, the swishing rain, the sighing of the trees, and the like.

But it is largely the story of adventure and the story of setting that will require the greatest selection of details for bringing out the unity of impression most effectively A story of character will not require great attention to setting, only in so far as character is affected by environment. And a story of

idea will demand still less adherence to strict selection of striking and harmonious setting effects for the purpose of bringing out more strikingly the author's supreme purpose.

It will be seen from the foregoing that unity of impression occupies a very important niche in the realm of story writing. Unity of impression very often is the thing that decides for or against a story's acceptance. One story may be a splendid model of cleverly devised and constructed plot complication, but an editor on reading it may not be particularly impressed; it will not remain fixed in his mind; rather, he will promptly forget it and the writer will wonder why his story did not get by. Another story, simple in plot and dealing with commonplace incidents, may be so permeated and suffused with the author's theme, be so impregnated with the author's enthusiastic treatment of his main, dominant, underlying purpose and idea, contain so much of charm because of its harmony of tone, that the editor instantly and avidly will accept it.

The patient author, therefore, will determine well beforehand just what impression he desires to create in the reader's mind. And, as it must be the very emotion, together with its application to the human side of life as exampled in the story, that the author has in his own mind, it is inevitable that the reader receive exactly the same meaning, the identical spirit of the theme; for the reader gets just what the writer gives, so much and no more. As much art and as much feeling as a story contains, just that proportion of delight does the reader experience. Story writing is an excellent mirror for the reader to look into the author's heart and read there of the power of the latter's emotions and the sincerity of his convictions. The sea receives as much water as comes to it from the streams which flow down to meet it; the reader obtains as much sense, as exact a quantity of emotion, of enthusiasm, as the author is able or sees fit to inject into his story. The writer will do well to bear this truth firmly in mind. If he has assimilated all the rules of story writing and follows out the various injunctions given in this volume, yet his work persists in returning, then he has only himself to blame. It is only because the charm of his subject

has not seized him with sufficient power for him to impart strong emotion, dynamic play of forces, delicacy of touch, and sincerity of tone to his work.

In this, as in all phases of story writing, we advise the author again in that very trite, but sensible, way, to read the master writers for shining models of unity of impression. We especially recommend the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Hawthorne, De Maupassant, Stevenson, and Kipling. Their works are especially prominent because of the harmony of tone of their stories. This probably is so because these authors recognized the value of unity of impression, strove after it and attained it. And, without a particle of doubt, it is due in main to unity of impression that so many of their stories have charm and proportion, a single dominant emotion brought out fittingly at every forward step of the story.

Chapter XII

HOW TO CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE TITLE

With regard to the point of time at which a title may most judiciously be chosen, whether before or after the story has been written, no absolute rule can be fixed. Some writers find they can decide with greater facility upon the best title for their particular script after all the constituents of the plot have been grounded firmly in their minds. The theme then shines out with greater meaning—luminous, apparent, exact. Or, again, the very uniqueness of the situation forming the main interest of the story may be so unmistakable in the concrete terms which explain it, that the proper title will come readily and unbidden to the pen. Still again, the title may sum up in a well-considered phrase the thematic importance and pith of the plot, though at the same time the cleverness of word arrangement and the significance of the words selected should portend a far different treatment of the theme than was ever before attempted.

There even are people, places, phrases, and ideas who and that, in themselves, suggest excellent titles, hence it may be said that the title itself may often prove the foundation of a story. Consider what a multitude of suggestions tumble forth at the mention of the title, "The Man Without a Country," or "The House of Offense." Give either one of these titles to any number of persons who never had seen the stories to which they pertain, and it would not be exaggeration to say that not a single one would interpret the title exactly the same as the other.

There are several reasons why great caution should be exercised in the choice of the title. Chief among them is the influence, good or bad, the title is bound to have upon the editor;

even though the reader never looked at the title of the story he intended reading, if only to impress the editor it would be well worth the beginner's time to labor assiduously until he had found the exact title to fit his particular production, one that would bring out the plot's crux, its big appeal, in the most startling, yet not sensational, manner. Editors and editorial readers are human just as the rest of us. If a manuscript comes before their attention bearing a title that means little or nothing, which brings up no definite mental picture in the mind, then they are very apt to cast the story in the pile with the rest of the rejected. The editor argues in this manner: Surely, if the writer has not enough perspicacity to devise a new, catchy title, then it would be a waste of time to wade through his stuff; nine chances out of ten the plot is just as uninteresting as the title. And such is the truth of affairs. Set before an editor a manuscript that possesses a heading guaranteed to make him gasp for breath by reason of its novelty and appropriateness—and the manuscript is half sold! The editor's interest has been aroused, his favor has been gained, he is predisposed toward the story, and will read it in a broad, indulgent, receptive frame of mind; and if there exists in his mind any doubt concerning the salability of the production, he may even, and kindly, suggest changes to be made, or buy the script outright and perform them himself!

The good title possesses several essential requisites. It should be short, apt, original, specific, compelling. The long title usually tells too much and is too cumbersome. The title should be terse, meaty, epigrammatic, easily remembered. Perhaps the greatest requirement of the title, though, is that it be original. Take the average person who is an extensive reader of the popular magazines. What is the story he usually decides to read? What factor does he allow to bear the greatest weight in his selection of his evening's enjoyment? Let the beginner consider his own experience as a reader. Has it not been his custom to run a finger down the table of contents and choose that story which, by its title, holds promise of having the quickest action, the most original and unique situations? Most assuredly. After all, the

title is merely a device to tickle our curiosity. We all are seekers after novelty, excitement, sensation, or the intensely emotional; consequently, if any title cleverly intimates that the story for which it serves as ambassador has plenty of these heart-gripping elements in its unfolding, we are very apt to read it.

In addition to originality the correct title should be specific, as opposed to general. The reader wishes to have some hint concerning the character of the story before he reads it, for few people plunge blindly through the contents of a magazine. Surely no one could obtain such intimation from a title so general as "His Reformation." Such a title conveys only one definite idea: that somewhere, somehow in the course of the story, someone is reformed. The ordinary individual is not sufficiently desirous of reading about reformation in general and in such indefinite guise, to go ahead with the story. Reformations are of a thousand different hues and possibilities; they might take place in any corner of the globe and be enacted under an unlimited diversity of conditions. Such a title, then, is as general as life itself and the abstract qualities which compose life. The story with "His Reformation" as the title might contain the element of love; in that case the title "Love" would apply just as well as the other. Indeed, it might apply better, for the reformation could be brought about by a man's love for a good woman. In that event it would be the part of the author to express in a single, short phrase the main peculiarity of just how the woman helped or inspired the man to reform. The writer is then approaching the center of the story's difference and claim to originality, the point wherein lies the story's distinguishable freshness.

The method of taking the title from the name of the chief character has long since gone out of style not so greatly with novels as with the short story. So many novels, but especially those of the past century, were studies of the gradual unfolding of character, the title could, with some show of reasonableness, be the name of the main character. In retrospect the title was specific because the character whose name it was held the main center of interest throughout the novel; the reader had

obtained a unified impression of one main character, predominant above all others; so the title seemingly was applicable. It lacked, however, any power of capturing the prospective reader's interest, and, in these days, when so many thousands of short stories are being published, there naturally must exist among authors quite strenuous effort to outdo all others in the freshness of their titles—in the appeal they carry. Consequently, while they were prevalent in the past, the writer of short stories will do well to avoid such uninteresting titles as: "Marjorie Daw," "Romola," "Tom Jones," "Ligeia," "Schlemihl," "Amos Barton," and so on.

Akin to the title giving the name of the chief personage is the title in which the hero's or heroine's name is coupled with some descriptive term, intimating the exact situation in which the hero becomes involved—some peculiarity which singles him out for especial attention, the place where the main events of the plot occur, and so on. Examples of the adjective-name title are, "Black Silas" and "Patient Griselda." Of the titles having the chief character's name coupled with the main situation of the story are: "Peter Rugg, The Missing Man," "The Shyness of Shorty," "The Americanization of Roll-Down Joe," "The Madness of Philip" and "The Ordination of John Fairmeadow."

In many stories, chiefly those of setting, the titles are chosen from certain places, or their peculiarities, in which the action occurs. Of such, are: "The House on the Beach," "The Mystery of Witchface Mountain," "The House of a Thousand Candles," "Up the Cooly," and "The Great Stone Face."

Especially effective are those titles that are the names of concrete objects contained in the stories, objects that take an all-important part in the working out of the complication. The more common this concrete object is, the more familiar people are with its nature, the more likely are they to remember the story it heads, for the reason that the story and the concrete object, imaged firmly on the mind, remain irrevocably associated. Examples of such titles are: "The Monkey's Paw," "The Mask," "The Scarlet Letter," "The Piece of String," "The Black Cat,"

"The Turquoise Cup," "An Extra Blanket," and "The Black Pearl."

Lastly in this category of titles come those based upon an idea preferably the theme of the story. Examples of such are: "Where Love Is, There God Is Also," "The Lost Word," "The Other Wise Man," "The Man Without a Country," "The Call of the Wild," and "The Law of His Nature."

We will treat here very briefly the enigmatical title; the title which is so very puzzling, yet withal so very inviting; which seems contradictory of its very self, as "The Living Dead Man," yet suggesting a very engaging story. The enigmatical title is excellent in the hands of the expert; but, if the amateur dallies with it, his titles are more likely to be meaningless, a mere jumble of words; for this sort of title must be written with several aims in view: it must conceal effectively the story's main peculiarity, it must be very interesting, and must meet all the other requirements of the title with regard to length, etc. Examples of such titles are: "They," "The Man Who Was," "The Suicide Club," "Pigs Is Pigs," and "After He Was Dead."

He will be a wise author, too, who proportions his title to the kind and amount of interest in his story. Consider how disappointed and outraged a reader would be if drawn to read a quiet little character sketch, or a story of setting, by reason of a very inviting, almost sensational, title, which would have been an excellent caption for a blood and thunder tale but very much out of place as title for a character story. The writer's title, then, should arouse no more pleasurable anticipation than the author comfortably can satisfy through the telling of his story.

As an exercise in choosing interesting and appropriate titles, the reader should reflect on the aptness of the title after he has read a story. Let him study the theme, then ask himself what he would have named the story. In writing his stories, too, the beginner should choose not one title merely, but many of them; then he may choose the best.

Chapter XIII

STORIES OF MYSTERY

The Detective Story.

Many of the readers of this book will be especially fitted to write detective stories, stories involving the untying of a knot that seemingly has worked itself into a dizzy jumble of strands leading nowhere and incapable of any sensible solution. For their benefit we are appending an analysis of the detective story, and pointing out just where it differs, in mechanism, from other stories.

As the reader doubtless will recall by casting his mind back over the many detective stories he has read, this type of story follows the principle of ratiocination, or the deductive method, that procedure of reasoning which considers certain truths or hypotheses at hand and from them forms an opinion, or solves some puzzling situation. Therefore, the usual detective story starts off with a deep puzzle. A man has been murdered, a young girl has disappeared, the family jewels have dissolved, seemingly into mid-air, important diplomatic papers have been spirited away. The complication to be solved is set forth in the first few paragraphs; the remainder of the story concerns itself solely with the method of finding out why, who, and where; it consists of resolving the complication to a sensible conclusion.

The more unusual the theft, the more bizarre the disappearance, the more meaningless the murder, the greater the reader's anxiety and eagerness to follow the mode of procedure by which the mystery is explained. Suppose a man is found murdered in his apartments and it is known that he had not an enemy in the world; we will assume he possesses no great amount of wealth

or abilities which might make him a source of envy to any individual, and that he has always been disposed to sacrifice himself for the comfort of others. The problem is: who killed the man and for what reason was the crime committed? There are absolutely no tangible reasons, no visible signs of a struggle, no slightest clue to work upon; the most imaginative fail to conjecture a plausible reason why this particular man should have been struck down.

When the mystery is accentuated in this manner, when the crime consummated has no plausible motive to actuate it, then the reader's curiosity is very apt to be piqued to an extreme degree. The greater the mystery to be solved, the greater will be the reader's fervor in following the method of the individual who attempts to find the solution.

The author, however, must not commit the mistake of starting off with a very promising mystery to be solved and then allow the detective to triumph by any ordinary or unheroic means. The pleasure that the reader derives from the detective story rests largely in the enthralling adventures, chases and clashes the detective falls into, the setbacks, seemingly unsurmountable, that he comes face to face with, and the very ingenious methods he resorts to for a solution of the problem.

In some detective stories the conclusion has not been reached even after the criminal is apprehended, for not yet do we know all the details of his capture and the brilliant maneuver of the detective in trapping his victim is not clearly revealed to us. Hence, the detective must tell, usually in his own words, as a conversation to a friend or accomplice, the manner in which he finally seized the criminal. Other stories of the detective variety are concluded immediately upon the confession or capture of the criminal or criminals, for the method by which the hero solved the mystery is explained step by step just as it occurred.

It will be wise, occasionally, to allow the reader to get a look ahead into the story so that he will realize faintly just what is coming before the author allows the detective himself to know. To reveal some coming movement of your plot to a reader in this manner is very complimentary to the latter; the

reader pats himself on the back for being more clever than the detective himself. This device is useful because it puts the reader in a receptive and kindly mood toward the author. You see, the reader himself is taking an active, positive part in your story just as much as the hero; hence, the former should be allowed the liberty, every now and anon, of doing a little detective work himself and of flattering himself that he is a wee bit wiser, a trifle more profound and penetrating than the detective. And inasmuch as the individual reads the story to derive pleasure from it, why not?

It must not be supposed, though, that all detective or mystery stories have criminals to be run down, or that a man found dead has been killed by some human agency. The detective story based upon some accident upon the scientific, or upon a unique move of fate, has been in vogue for some time and countless numbers of them, excellently and plausibly presented too, have been published. A man may be killed in a multitude of ways, the author must remember; any agency that will deprive a person of breath or of food or other means of existence, takes his life. A character might be killed by the agency of some gas, generated in some odd manner and disappearing almost immediately after the character's demise.

All the criminal characters of the detective story need not be reprehensible, vile, loathsome, dirty, atrophied individuals, embodying in their appearance the evils which they seem to delight in. The more intellectual and innocent in appearance the criminal, the more educated and faultless in conduct, the greater will be the conflict between the two forces involved: one to keep the mystery unsolved and to prevent the approach of just punishment, the other to ferret out the criminal and triumph over the latter's fabrication of evil.

The author might do well to study several representative detective stories, especially those of such writers as Conan Doyle, Arthur B. Reeve, Anna Katherine Green, E. Phillips Oppenheim, and Edgar A. Poe. The last author named presents the mystery of his story, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," thusly:

This event occurred about two years after the atrocity in the Rue Morgue. Marie was the only daughter of the widow Estelle Roget. The father had died during the child's infancy, and from the period of his death, until within eighteen months before the assassination which forms the subject of our narrative, the mother and daughter had dwelt together in the Rue Pavee Saint Andrée; Madame there keeping a pension, assisted by Marie. Affairs went on thus until the latter had attained her twenty-second year, when her great beauty attracted the notice of a perfumer, who occupied one of the shops in the basement of the Palais Royal, and whose custom lay, chiefly, among the desperate adventurers infesting that neighborhood. Monsieur Le Blanc was not unaware of the advantages to be derived from the attendance of the fair Marie in his perfumery; and his liberal proposals were accepted eagerly by the girl, although with somewhat more of hesitation by Madame.

The anticipations of the shopkeeper were realized, and his rooms soon became notorious through the charms of the sprightly grisette. She had been in his employ about a year, when her admirers were thrown into confusion by her sudden disappearance from the shop. Monsieur Le Blanc was unable to account for her absence, and Madame Roget was distracted with anxiety and terror. The public papers immediately took up the theme, and the police were upon the point of making serious investigations, when, one fine morning, after the lapse of a week, Marie, in good health, but with a somewhat saddened air, made her re-appearance at her usual counter in the perfumery. All inquiry, except that of a private character, was, of course, immediately hushed. Monsieur Le Blanc professed total ignorance, as before. Marie, with Madame, replied to all questions, that the last week had been spent at the house of a relation in the country. Thus the affair died away, and was generally forgotten; for the girl, ostensibly to relieve herself from the impertinence of curiosity, soon bade a final adieu to the perfumer, and sought the shelter of her mother's residence in Rue Pavee Saint Andrée.

It was about five months after this return home, that her friends were alarmed by her sudden disappearance for

the second time. Three days elapsed, and nothing was heard of her. On the fourth, her corpse was found floating in the Seine, near the shore which is opposite the Quartier of the Rue Saint Andrée, and at a point not very far distant from the secluded neighborhood of the Barrière du Roule.

The Supernatural, or Horror Story.

In constructing a story of the supernatural, a device is involved which, if it be not taken into account, will leave the author's "ghost" story lusterless. This device is that of making all the mystery, the causation of the horror, an "unknown" quantity, a thing of Doubt. The reader must not be allowed to catch a view of the thing from which springs the horror of the story, else all suspense will collapse with great dispatch. Unless the author is very clever indeed he will not be able to explain away an anachronism of Nature which he might unheedingly allow to appear before the eyes of several people. Rather he must leave his ghosts, his strange noises, his weird wailing, and the gnashing of teeth, to dark, empty chambers where gruesome murders have been perpetrated to dank, winding cellars and underground chambers, whispering forests, eerie moors, or to mysterious deserted battlements of partly dismantled castles, their proper breeding places. But the illusion of suspense and horror is broken immediately the reader *knows* just what it is that causes the furori of terrible emotions on the part of the characters, and, incidentally, the reader himself. The reader may know eventually just what the mystery is, but that is the end of the story; after he does know, he is no longer interested in that particular story, for his curiosity has been fully quenched.

Some horror stories reach their conclusion without the Unknown being seen or explained; the interest lies wholly in the fact that the hero or heroine escaped the loathsome influence of the terror, or braved its presence for one ever-to-be-remembered hour. The hero may look into the dark chamber and his fingers may clutch spasmodically at the thin air, his

features may blanch slowly and his very blood may seem to congeal, yet the true form of the unspeakable, if it have any, must remain a mystery to the reader. The main personage of the story may be so horrified by the spectacle, or the cold hand that touches his face, or the terrifying events which occur to him, that he is unable to tell what caused them, even if he knew, and, by this inability to articulate his experiences, will the suspense of the story be maintained.

The master of the horror story is Poe. By a close scrutiny of his mystery stories, the student will learn much of the method employed in effectively devising and building up the materials of the horror story.

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Michael Wayne
Jr.
alice Johnny.

Flora Brent
Gregory Warn

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Edith, Ruth & Marion
Willie